

economies, which will mean there's less purchasing power for the product.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, and welcome to Moscow.

The President. Looking forward to it. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 9:58 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 6. In his remarks, the President referred to Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

Interview With Rustavi 2 Television of Georgia May 5, 2005

President's Upcoming Visit to Georgia

Q. Mr. President, let me thank you very much for this opportunity to interview you. And on behalf of Georgian people, let me welcome you to Georgia.

Why have you decided to visit Georgia? None of the American Presidents have visited this country before.

The President. You know, I got to know your President, and I can remember him urging me to come to Georgia. He's got such enthusiasm about life and about the future of Georgia. And I have been most impressed by the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, that I said, "I want to go. I want to see—I want to feel the sense of a new democracy. I want to be there to thank the Georgian people for setting such a good example for other countries that have followed." And so I'm really looking forward to the trip.

Georgian Economy/Georgia-Russia Relations

Q. Mr. President, Georgia faces a lot of problems, among them two unresolved conflicts, quite difficult economic situation, Russian military presence in the country. How do you see resolving all those problems?

The President. Peacefully. And I think they will be resolved peacefully. But you're right. It's difficult to go from a country of—a communist country to a free country. It's not easy. I think the President under-

stands that, and his Government understands that.

On the economic front, there's a lot of work to be done, but by routing out corruption and insisting upon rule of law and transparency, that will help to attract investment and capital.

Secondly, in terms of the regional disputes or the bases, I can help some. But the best way to do this—deal with this issue is to do it peacefully between Russia and Georgia. And I think we've got a very good chance of seeing these issues resolved in a peaceful way. It just takes time sometimes to deal with old disputes.

Russia and Democracies in Eastern Europe

Q. The latest developments of the Eastern European region, I mean, the Georgia's Rose Revolution and Orange Revolution—

The President. Yes.

Q. —in Ukraine and elections in Moldova and revolution in Kyrgyzstan, caused Russia's negative reaction. And relations between Moscow and these countries are getting worse. So how is U.S. going to support these transitional democracies in the future?

The President. No, that's a great question, and the first thing is, is that when I see President Putin, I will remind him again that democracies on his border will make it easier for Russia to grow in a peaceful way. Democracies are peaceful.

Democracies don't like war, and democracies are the best form of government to deal with animosities and concerns.

And so I will remind him that this is not a plot by anybody or any nation. This is just the inevitable course of humankind because all humans want to be free. And as Georgia's economy begins to grow and pick up, Russia will have a trading partner; Russia will realize that a prosperous democracy in her south is good for the people of Russia.

Cooperative Response to Pankisi Gorge Terrorists

Q. U.S. Department's annual report on terrorism raised some questions about the stability in Pankisi Gorge.

The President. Yes.

Q. But Georgian Government, with support of U.S., was successful in cleaning this gorge of military elements. So how will relations—I mean, military cooperation between Georgia and the United States in the future?

The President. Well, I appreciate that. No, it's going to be very close, obviously at the request of the Georgian Government. And I—the Georgian Government asked for help in routing out the terrorists who had lodged themselves in the Pankisi Gorge—training help. We were more than happy to provide it. But remember what was interesting about some of those operations: There was close cooperation with the Russians. And I thought that was very helpful and very instructive about what can happen, because it's in Russia's interest, it's in the United States interest, and more importantly, it's in Georgia's interest to make sure the Pankisi Gorge is clear of terrorist

traffic or terrorist safe haven. No country wants terrorists who are willing to cause harm living within their border. And so I found this to be a very instructive and interesting cooperative arrangement.

Georgia's Possible NATO Membership

Q. Georgia is seeking NATO membership.

The President. Yes.

Q. How big is chance?

The President. It's good. But remember, this is a performance-based criterion. In other words, there's a way to get into NATO. And I will tell President Saakashvili that there's—to look at the countries that have recently been admitted and see what decisions they made and how they—what they did. And I would hope it's good. But just remember, it's a process. It just doesn't happen overnight. And that's not only what I have told your President, but I've told the President of Ukraine and other countries that are interested in joining NATO.

Q. Thanks for your precious time, Mr. President.

The President. Glad you're here. Looking forward to going to Georgia. It's going to be an exciting trip.

Q. I wish you a successful and safest trip.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 10:07 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 6. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; and President Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine.

Remarks on Being Presented the Order of Three Stars, First-Class in Riga, Latvia

May 7, 2005

Madam President, I gratefully accept. I am so honored and so thrilled to be here in your beautiful country.

I was telling the President that it's such a joy to come to a country that loves and values freedom and to be in the presence of a President who speaks so clearly about the need for people to be free and her recognition that a free world will yield peace.

And so, Madam President, thank you for your hospitality, and thank you so much for this great honor. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Hall of Coats and Arms at Riga Castle. In his remarks, he referred to President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia in Riga

May 7, 2005

President Vike-Freiberga. We are, of course, very gratified at this sudden interest in Latvia that we're seeing among the journalists. [Laughter] And it's truly a great pleasure to see these wonderful journalists coming to my country and having a look around. And, Mr. President, I think that you have something to do with that. [Laughter]

President Bush. Well, thank you for having us, Madam President. It's been a trip I've really been anxious to fulfill. I admire your leadership; I admire your country's courage. I love the fact that you're a free nation and willing to speak out so clearly for freedom. So, thanks for the hospitality.

President Vike-Freiberga. And we're pleased that the cameras are now turned on Latvia while you are here. [Laughter]

President Bush. That's right.

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Thank you all. We'll have ample opportunity in an open press conference. And I certainly wouldn't want you to fire your best question here. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:10 a.m. in the Golden Hall at Riga Castle. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.